THE WORKS OF CHAUCER.

PROFESSOR SKEAT'S COMPLETE EDITION.

[FIRST NOTICE.]

THE COMPLETE WORKS OF GEOFFREY CHAUCER. Edited from numerous manuscripts by the Rev. Walter W. Skeat, Litt. D., LL. D., Ph. D., M. A. Six volumes. Price $4 a volume. Oxford: At the Clarendon Press. 1894.

Chaucer died in 1400. Nearly five hundred years have gone by since that date, and it is not until the present time that the complete body of his works has been brought out under the supervision of an accomplished scholar. This comparative neglect of one of the four greatest poets of our literature is perhaps a testimony of itself to the richness of a literature which could afford to neglect him; but it is also evidence of the little interest which the English-speaking race has until lately taken in its earlier authors. Had Chaucer been a German, the trouble now would not have been with the lack of editors of his works, but with their excessive number.

Not but what there have been many editions which purport to furnish a complete collection of the poet's productions. Perhaps it is fair to say of all of them that in every case they possess value of a certain sort. Even the poorest of them—that of 1721, which goes under the name of Urry's—has some claim to consideration. But the present is the first time that a complete text of the author has been made up from a careful examination and comparison of the best manuscripts, and has had brought to its rectification the resources of special investigation and wide scholarship. It is therefore eminently fitting that such an edition should receive a scrutiny and a degree of attention which would be out of place applied to incomplete editions, however excellent, which have been designed to answer only partial needs.

No small share of the present work, it is true, has been already before the public for a longer or shorter period. Much of it is little else than a reproduction, both as regards text and commentary, of the various excellent schoolbooks which have been brought out from time to time by the present editor. The minor poems have so appeared, as well as many of Chaucer's more important productions. Still there is a good deal of the "Canterbury Tales," which has met with but little attention from any one since the days of Tyrwhitt; and belonging to this neglected portion is much of the poet's most characteristic work. Furthermore, but scanty labor has hitherto been spent in producing a satisfactory text of "Troilus and Criseyde." Nor must it be inferred that the texts which Professor Skeat has already published have not undergone re-examination and revision. In every case they doubtless represent in their present form the latest results which the editor has reached.

Still, so large a share of this work, both text and commentary, has already been so long before the public that the whole body of scholars has had ample opportunity and leisure to become acquainted with Professor Skeat's merits and defects as an editor. In regard to both, there is substantial unanimity of opinion. It hardly needs to be said that the merits far outweigh the defects. It is desirable to emphasize this fact at the outset, because in the notice of a critical edition which aspires to be a definitive one, it is the defects that must receive special attention; and the amount of space necessarily given up to the consideration of these has a tendency to mislead the reader into attaching to them an altogether disproportionate importance. No one certainly will dispute the fitness in many ways of Professor Skeat for the task he has taken upon himself. He has been a long and faithful student of our early speech. He has to a large extent made the literature of the Middle English period his own. He therefore brings to the work of editing Chaucer many qualifications of the first order. He is especially familiar with the language of the fourteenth century. This he has become, not only by the general nature of his linguistic studies, but by the constant necessity which has been imposed upon him of dealing with it in detail in the numerous texts he has ably edited. Upon the explanation of difficult passages and obscure allusions contained in them, he has spent years of research. This preliminary preparation has naturally fitted him to handle with special knowledge the numerous linguistic questions that necessarily arise in connection with the text of Chaucer.

Nor has Profesor Skeat, moreover, relied upon his own unassisted efforts. He has in no case neglected to avail himself of the aid of others who have been laboring in the same field. Few articles or treatises that deal directly or remotely with the text of Chaucer have escaped his attention. While most of what new work that has been done is due to his own independent investigation, he frequently goes out of his way to express his obligations to others. He does it indeed on occasions when there seems little reason for any acknowledgment. With the humility of the true scholar he begs leave, to use his own words, "to disclaim any merit, not doubting that most of what I have said may very likely have been said by others and said better"; and he adds what he is undoubtedly justified in declaring, that he has "often found it less troublesome to consult original authorities for myself, than to hunt up what others have said relative to the passage under consideration."

In the light of Professor Skeat's general practice, the apologetic explanation just quoted might fairly be deemed to carry to excess the modesty of genuine scholarship. As a sort of corrective to this, it is gratifying, therefore, to be able to point out a partial exception to this profusion of acknowledgment of universal obligation. I trust I shall not be accused of overstepping the bounds of legitimate criticism when I remark that nothing in the first three volumes of this work has impressed me more than the solicitous care with which Professor Skeat refrains from mentioning my name, when it can decently be avoided, unless it be to couple it with a supposed error I have made or to cavil at some view I have taken. This statement is in no sense true of the final volumes; and even in the case of the first three there is plenty to show that what I have written, though unmentioned, has not been overlooked. Indeed, as I turn over the pages of the first half of this valuable work I am constantly comforted by the reflection that though lost to sight, I still remain to memory dear. Professor Skeat does not hesitate to adopt my facts or to accept my conclusions, even when he is most careful to refrain from mentioning my name in connection with them. His arguments are occasionally directed to controvert something which I have said, even when not referring to me as having said it. Modification of opinion previously expressed by him or universally expressed by others can be found in several instances on his pages, and they are in accord with the views I have put forth. I do not wish to burden the criticism of the work with personal matter in which the public can take but little interest. Still it would be distinctly unfair to make assertions of this kind without bringing forward some sort of evidence in their support. There are a number of instances that might be cited, but I will confine myself to two, one concerned with the life of the poet, and the other with the text of his writings.

Ever since the discovery of the Scrope and Grosvenor roll, it has been known that Chaucer took part in the last invasion of France by Edward III. Retters is a place at which the poet in his deposition mentions his having been present. No town with such a name now exists. The common statement in regard to it has been that it must be Retiers in Britanny. This has been the view regularly taken by those who have made any attempt to fix definitely the site of the place. In the first volume of my "Studies in Chaucer" (p. 56), I denied that the generally accepted belief could be true. All that I then felt justified in saying about the point in question was that the place was unknown, but that it could not be Retiers in Britanny, for the army of Edward III was at the time specified fully two hundred miles from the spot. Subsequently in the appendix (vol. iii, p. 453) I was enabled to assert positively that there could be little doubt that the place was Rethel, in the present department of Ardennes. It was the first time that any statement to this effect had ever been made. I could of course have come upon the knowledge of the truth by accident. As a matter of fact, it cost me some pains in examining the old French chronicles in order to ascertain it, and thereby correct the error of previous biographers. Professor Skeat concurs in the results I reached. He remembers to record the information communicated. He remembers to forget the person who communicated it.

The other example is concerned with the emendation of the text. In the "Parliament of Fowls" in all modern editions occur, in the description given of the various birds, the following lines:

The swallow, mordrer of the bees smale,
That maken honey of flowers fresh of hew.

Bees, however, is not found in a single manuscript. Eleven of the thirteen printed read *fowles*, and one its equivalent, *briddes*, that is, "birds." To represent the swallow as the murderer of birds, which birds also make honey, was almost aggressively absurd, and in spite of the weight of authority in favor of the reading, was manifestly incorrect. The single remaining manuscript read *flyes*, "flies." That was also the word found in the earlier black-letter editions till the folio of 1561. Then and there *bees* was substituted in its place. Though the genuineness of *bees* was made suspicious on literary grounds by the addition in the line following of the somewhat unnecessary information that they were in the habit of making honey, the word was accepted and remained in all subsequent editions. For instance, in 1888 Professor Skeat brought out a volume containing the "Minor Poems," in which the "Parliament of Fowls" was included. In it he adhered to the reading which had been in use since 1561. He appended, indeed, to the line containing it the following foot-note: "Bees must be right; but there is no authority for it except that of the black-letter editions; thus, ed. 1561 has Bees." Here again I pointed out in my "Studies in Chaucer" (vol i., p. 243) that *bees* was certainly wrong as well as unauthorized; that the reading *flyes* of the earlier black-letter editions was correct, and to prove it quoted two passages from Chaucer himself—one from the Parson's tale and the other from the translation of Boethius—to the effect that bees were then called flies which made honey. In Professor Skeat's present edition *flies* now makes its appearance, but with nothing beyond the mere assurance that it is "the right reading"; and the briefest of references follows to the same passages I had already quoted.

Far be it from me, of course, to insinuate that Professor Skeat's knowledge of the facts I have just mentioned, or of others I could mention, was derived from me. They were presumably among those instances in which, as he says, he found it less troublesome to consult original authorities for himself than to hunt up what others have said relative to the passage under consideration. Still his silence in regard to any connection of mine with facts which I was the first to note or views which I was the first to put forth naturally forces itself upon my attention when contrasted with the fairly effusive way in which he acknowledges his obligations to Teutonic scholars. Take for illustration the old point of the alteration, without the slightest authority, of *yerne* to *erne* in the "Book of the Duchess." "Of the restoration of this line," he writes, "I should have had some reason to be proud; but I find that Ten Brink (who seems to miss nothing) has anticipated me." My own personal opinion in this case is that Professor Skeat would have been justified in feeling much prouder if he had refrained from making any emendation at all, and had contented himself with leaving the text, as according to all existing authorities, Chaucer wrote it.

At bottom, however, these are matters of little importance, and in his later volumes Professor Skeat has given me all the credit I could ask, and very likely more than I deserve. The honor of priority in discovering a fact sure to be discovered, and of making an emendation certain some time to be made, is not, in truth, of a kind about which one need feel any undue exaltation. So long as the right result is reached, it matters comparatively little by what means or through whose agency it is reached. There are far graver defects than these, which hinder this work from being regarded as an ideal edition of Chaucer, though they must not be construed into a denial of its general excellence. Still it would be improper in expressing a critical judgment to pass them over in silence. Unfair it would obviously be to dwell on little oversights and occasional inaccuracies in matters of no essential importance. Several of these I have noted; but lapses of such a kind are almost inevitable in a work of this magnitude, in which it is practically impossible to keep the attention constantly fixed upon points of detail. Their appearance does not detract from the real value of what has been accomplished, and indeed it is rarely that it misleads. The faults to which attention is now to be called are either such as characterize the general treatment, or are the results of views deliberately adopted and zealously maintained.

I have said elsewhere that for the editing of Chaucer there is not demanded merely the special learning of the grammarian, or the general learning of the scholar, but even in a higher degree the cultivated taste of the man of letters. It was the possession of this last qualification which gave Tyrwhitt his prominence and renders his opinions as an editor still necessary to be considered, in spite of the vast advance which English scholarship has made since his time. It is in this last qualification that Professor Skeat most signally fails. On the literary side he is as weak as on the linguistic side he is strong. This may seem a hard saying to utter of a man who began his career as an author by making a translation—and by no means a bad translation—of poems of Uhland, and who to this very day occasionally drops into verse in the columns of the London weeklies. It is probable that the absorbing attention paid to linguistic detail has to some extent impaired, as it often does, literary appreciation. That such at any rate has been the result it is not likely that any one who considers the examples to be furnished will be disposed to deny. Before giving these, however, it is desirable to bring out prominently a general tendency which is just now characterizing the study of Chaucer.

No student of literary history is likely to forget how Shakspeare was edited in the last century. From Pope to Stevens, and even later, his lines were put through all manner of mangling processes to compel them to conform to the models which the metrical virtue of the eighteenth century had set up. Words were added, or words were dropped, in order to preserve the perfect regularity which was held to be the imperative requirement of English heroic verse. Sometimes, indeed, other words were made to take the place of those found in the original text. We were presented with Shakspeare chastened and purified, his irregularities corrected, his imperfections supplied; with Shakspeare, in fine, not as he was, but as in the eyes of purists he ought to be.

These omissions and interpolations and alterations are in general scornfully rejected by modern editors of Shakspeare. Even the dullest of them prefers the poet in the garb in which he has been handed down by imperfect transmission to the most perfectly fitting garments devised by later metre-mongers. The fact is, therefore, not worth recording here for itself, but for its significance in connection with the writings of Chaucer. It is clear that the text of the earlier poet is to be subjected to the same processes which once worked havoc with the text of the later. There is unquestionably a certain amount of emendation needed in his case as in that of Shakspeare. But the golden rule that this emendation should be confined to the narrowest possible limits is very resolutely disregarded. It is by no means impossible, therefore, that for a time in place of the real Chaucer we shall be presented with an artificial one, who will be uniform in spelling, exactly regular in versification, and absolutely incapable of the monstrosity of using a word which does not correspond precisely in sound with the one with which it rhymes.

The present edition is a conspicuous illustration of this tendency. It is certainly to be regretted that a scholar so accomplished as Professor Skeat has not only fallen in with it, but is disposed to carry it to the farthest extreme. His prevailing fault as an editor is to sacrifice Chaucer on the score of an assumed regularity. To support his views he has not the slightest hesitation about adopting an inferior reading, or the reading of an inferior manuscript; or when all manuscript authority fails, he boldly changes the text to suit his preconceived views, or at least insists in a not [illegible] t ought to be changed. It is somewhat annoying to find a course like this taken by a scholar in whom one naturally wishes to repose implicit confidence. Yet the truth of each one of these charges will be fully substantiated. For the [illegible]se of making every point perfectly clear, only a few examples will be selected. But these will be significant ones, and their fewness will permit all the facts in each case to be fully presented. The reader in consequence will be left in a position to decide for himself on the justice or injustice of the criticism.

In the limited space at command, my main object will be to show how this fondness for artificial regularity works harm on the purely literary side. The first example will be the substitution of a word by Professor Skeat for a word of Chaucer. In the "Book of the Duchess" the hero is portrayed as celebrating the virtues and deploring the death of the heroine. In lines 1,037-40, for illustration, he is represented as expressing himself as follows, according to all the existing original authorities:

For certes she was, that swete wyf,
My suffisaunce, my lust, my lyf,
Myn hap, myn hele, and al my blisse,
My worldes welfare and my goddesse.

It is very noticeable that in each of the three last lines of this quotation there is a regular climax in the thought. In the final line the climax, as we should expect in the work of a great poet, reaches its utmost height. In it the sorrowful husband terms the woman he has loved and lost his "goddess." It is the language of exaggeration, but it is also the natural language of ardent devotion.

Now it is a pet theory of Professor Skeat that Chaucer was incapable of perpetrating what he calls a bad rhyme. When such occur, they are either explained away on various grounds, or emended out of existence. In this instance he resorts to the latter course. For *goddesse* he substitutes *lisse*, which he defines as "alleviation, solace, comfort." These are meanings imposed upon the word to suit the context, rather than those strictly belonging to it. *Lisse* ordinarily signifies either "rest, peace," or "cessation." However, let us take without grumbling the gifts the editor provides. "I here," he says, "substitute *lisse* for *goddesse* as in the authorities. The blunder is obvious. *Goddesse* clogs the line with an extra syllable, and gives a false rime such as Chaucer never makes." (Vol. i., p. 488.)

Chaucer might or might not have felt transported with joy at being told that he never made a false rhyme. But there can be no question as to what his feelings would have been in being held responsible for such an example of prosaic anticlimax as the text of Professor Skeat gives. For pathos we have bathos. There is certainly something diverting in a lover declaring of his mistress that she was his life, his bliss, his welfare in this world, and then rising to the culminating point of panegyric by terming her his alleviation. The diversion, however, such as it is, is not due to the poet, but to his editor. Professor Skeat explains the presence of goddesse by saying that *lisse* was going out of use, and the scribes did not understand it. Accordingly they substituted for it *goddesse*, being led doubtless to the choice of this particular word by its exceedingly close resemblance to the word whose place it takes. There is one objection at least to this view. *Lisse* occurs several times in Chaucer. As a noun it appears in line 220 of the "House of Fame," in line 343 of book III of "Troilus and Criseyde," and in line 510 of the Franklin tale. As a verb it appears also in line 442 of the last named piece. In none of these instances has it terrified the scribes who have unflinchingly set it down, without feeling the necessity of substituting another word in its place.

It is the so-called false rhyme, as has been seen, that leads Professor Skeat in this example to turn *goddesse* into *lisse*. But another reason given for this alteration is found in the undying hostility he feels to lines that come short of or overrun the ideal number. A first foot consisting of a single syllable is the only concession he will make to poetic liberty. All other sins of redundancy or deficiency must be severely chastened, so as to preserve the perfect purity of Chaucer's verse. A method of correcting the former iniquity has just been furnished; now comes a similar exhibition of a method of correcting the latter. In the "House of Fame" occur the following lines:

"A good persuasion,"
Quod I, "hit is; and lyk to be
Right so as thou hast preved me." (872-4.)

Here in verse written in the octo-syllabic measure is a line plainly consisting of but three feet. All the authorities agree in the reading. So far as the evidence that has come down can be trusted, it is the very reading that came from the author himself. But such a state of things is distressing to an editor whose belief is that Chaucer could not have slept peacefully if his verse were not in strictest accordance with the metrical rules laid down by modern scholars for his guidance. Accordingly we find the first line amended in Professor Skeat's edition to read as follows:

Quod he. "A good persuasion."

This added "quod he" belongs to the previous speech, to which the lines quoted above are an answer. But in this same previous speech "quod he" has already been employed. One appearance is amply sufficient for it to do all the duty it is called upon to perform. Its duplication accordingly is not only unnecessary, it is positively offensive. Yet in order to force the line to conform to an imaginary model of prosodical propriety, Chaucer is made guilty of a piece of tautology of which a schoolboy ought to be ashamed.

Now comes the consideration of an example about which there can be, and perhaps always will be, difference of opinion, inasmuch as the interpretation is one that depends upon individual taste. It is only cited here because it exemplifies pointedly the preference which Professor Skeat exhibits for a prosaic rendering over a poetical one if the former has the support of what he deems a better rhyme. In this particular instance, it is safe to say that while language might be content with either interpretation, literature could be satisfied with but one of them. The reader, however, will be furnished with all the data needed to enable him to decide for himself. In the "House of Fame" the poet is speaking of the various sorts of minstrels that were thronging the palace of the goddess. There were those that made loud music on the bagpipe and the shawm; and others, he adds,

That craftely begunne pype,
Bothe in doucet and in rede,
That ben at festes with the brede.
—Lines 1,220-22.

This is the text as it is found in Professor Skeat's edition. The spelling of the last word is based upon the form in which it appears in the two early printed editions, and in the Pepys manuscript. The Fairfax manuscript, which the editor generally follows, has in the last two lines the rhymes *riede* and *bride*, the Bodleian manuscript has *riede* and *brycde*. There is some uncertainty as to the exact meaning of particular words in the passage cited; into the consideration of that, however, it is not necessary to enter here. But there is probably no one who takes up the poem for the sake of enjoying it as literature, who has ever formed from the last line of this quotation any other conception than that of a bridal feast with its accompaniment of revelry and music. It is exactly suitable, but above all it is poetical. Such an interpretation, however, would interfere with Professor Skeat's theories about Chaucer's versification, and would make the latter guilty of one of the most monstrous crimes possible to be committed by a poet, in having a word representing the modern English *reed* rhyming with a word representing the modern English *bride*. Consequently he fixed as the proper form here the word *brede*, meaning "roast meat." This, to be sure, is not found elsewhere in Chaucer, but occurs, as he tells us, in other authors. "The scribe of MS. F.," he writes, "turns *brede* into *bride*, regardless of the rime."

Had Chaucer been a cook, the explanation just given of the passage might be commended as a singularly happy one. But he is generally considered a poet, and on the whole it seems expedient to interpret him with that idea in mind. Roast beef is undoubtedly a noble and dignified article of diet from the culinary point of view; but, so far as I am aware, Professor Skeat has been the first to make its literary distinction prominent. I am disposed to believe—I do not profess absolute confidence—that had *brede* meant "ham and eggs," "veal cutlet" or "beefsteak," even Professor Skeat's metrical courage, heroic as it is, would have flinched at the word, and the faith he manifests in his rhyme would have been shaken. It may indeed be the opinion of some that there is a close bond of sympathy between music and roast beef; much closer certainly than between it and other solid meats. Still there are but few men possessed of literary taste who could ever be induced to believe that the introduction of this particular kind of food in this particular passage is highly conducive to poetical effect.

It is unavoidable that this concentration of the attention upon the rhymes and metre of the poet should operate to distract it from the due consideration of the meaning, or of its proper expression. Several examples of this inattention could be given. I prefer here, however, to select one in which the present editor has not been alone in finding a difficulty where none exists, although he has been the only one deliberately to select, after full examination, an inferior and almost impossible reading. It is indeed the same as that adopted by Wright, but Wright rarely deliberated, and seems never to have examined anything fully. In the description of the Monk in the general prologue to the "Canterbury Tales," the following lines give expression to the indifference of this ecclesiastic to the rules of his order and to his fondness for out-of-door sports:

He yaf nat of that text a pulled hen,
That seith that hunters been nat holy men;
Ne that a monk, whan he is recchelees,
Is lykned til a fish that is waterlees,
This is to seyn, a monk out of his cloistre;
But thilke text held he nat worth an oistre.

All the seven texts printed agree essentially in the reading of these lines, save that for *recchelees*, that is "reckless," the Harleian manuscript has *cloisterlees*. The former word seems to have troubled the commentators. Tyrwhitt suspected that it ought to be *regheles*, that is, "without rule." Ten Brink proposed to read *reccheless*, that is "without a resting-place, or place of retreat." Professor Skeat quotes with apparent approval that scholar's statement that a reckless or careless monk is not necessarily a monk out of his cloister. He has, however, a different remedy of his own. "The reading *cloisterless* (in MS. Harl.)," he says, "solves the difficulty; being a coined word Chaucer goes on to explain it."

The difficulty found in this passage is purely one of the imagination. There can be scarcely the slightest question that *recchelees*, which has far the best and most authority in its favor, is here the correct word, and has its regular sense of "careless, indifferent." It is employed in a somewhat similar way in the "House of Fame," where the god of love is spoken of as "Cupido the recchelees (l. 668)." He is there so termed because he has shown himself indifferent to the labor and devotion which the poet has displayed in his service. At the same time the epithet "reckless," so employed, was somewhat unusual. As it is found in the passage just quoted from the "Canterbury Tales," the context itself would not fix with positive precision its meaning, as it does in the "House of Fame." Chaucer therefore felt called upon to explain exactly what he meant by it. There is really no justification for the insertion of the verse

This is to seyn, a monk out of his cloistre,

save for the purpose of fixing the signification of the word *recchelees*. It is an imputation upon Chaucer's literary skill to suppose that he would give up a whole line to defining a self-explaining compound which under the circumstances could have but one possible meaning. Tyrwhitt, whose marvellous literary sagacity for once failed him somewhat in his comment upon this place, pointed out, however, the fundamental objection to *cloisterless*, that if it had been the true reading there would have been no occasion to explain or paraphrase it in the second line following. He neglected to go on and draw the further and almost inevitable inference that the very reason that the second line below was added was because *recchelees* did need an explanation or paraphrase. If we feel obliged to account for the presence of *cloisterless* in the Harleian or any other manuscript in which it appears, the ordinary reason for emending texts serves satisfactorily here. *Recchelees* with its somewhat unusual sense was glossed as *cloisterless*, and as not unfrequently happened, the marginal word replaced the original in the text of a few manuscripts.

While other examples might be furnished where the meaning of the poet has not received sufficient consideration, enough have been given to make clear that the literary quality of his verse has been made to suffer, either in consequence of inattention to it, or perhaps more frequently as a result of sacrificing it to the editor's views on language and metre. For the sake of securing Chaucer from the commission of insignificant minor faults, if they be faults at all, he is willing to make him responsible for grave ones affecting both the sense and the expression. This may be a point for which the purely linguistic student may care but little. It is, however, a matter of serious importance to those who read a great author for what he says and not merely for instruction in tests of rhyme and metre. Valuable these latter undoubtedly are. But to elevate them into objects of supreme attention reacts injuriously upon the man who falls into the habit, in this case upon the editor himself. He is not thinking so much of the thoughts of his author as of his rhymes, and whether they are in accord with certain theories of his own; and if they are not, how they are to be explained away or emended away, or rectified in any manner, no matter how much the expression suffers in consequence. That this disposition has not worked greater harm in the present instance is due to the general excellence of the text which has come down to us of most of Chaucer's productions. That enables us in the vast majority of cases to reproduce with something like absolute certainty the lines of the poet as he wrote them. The task, therefore, on the part of an editor of the fullest consideration of the signification is but rarely productive of injurious consequences.

Still injurious consequences do sometimes follow. Nor is the fact that it tends to impair literary appreciation the only drawback to this concentration of the attention upon exactness of rhyme and regularity of versification. It at times exerts a harmful influence in matters which concern language alone. Professor Skeat is under the sway of certain theories, and maintains them in their extremest form. When they break down, as they will occasionally persist in doing, he is unfair to himself and his well-earned reputation in not promptly admitting the fact. On the contrary, he seeks to avoid its acknowledgment, and resorts to various devices to break its force. For instance, he has committed himself unqualifiedly to the assertion that Chaucer never used assonant rhymes. Three instances, however, are found in his writings. Of one of these he disposes by dropping the offending word and substituting another in its place. In the second he substitutes for the best word best authorized a word found in an inferior manuscript. But there is a place in the second book of "Troilus and Criseyde" (l. 884), where there can be no question as to the use of assonance. *Syke*, "to sigh," rhymes with *endyte* and *whyte*. The authority in favor of this reading is so unanimous and overwhelming that Professor Skeat does not venture in the face of it to change the text. But he looks longingly toward a word that will make a perfectly orthodox rhyme, and his feelings find expression in the notes. "It has been pointed out," he there says, "that *syke* is not a perfect rhyme to *endyte*, *whyte*, but only an assonance. It is difficult to believe Chaucer guilty of this oversight; and hence I would suggest, with all submission to the critics, that possibly Chaucer wrote *syte*." This word, he goes on to explain, is found in the "Cursor Mundi," and signifies in that work "to be anxious." There is something almost pathetic in this protestation of unswerving loyalty to an impossible faith. One is reminded by it of the saying attributed to Cambronne: "The guard dies, but it never surrenders."

In truth, it is Professor Skeat's intense and unreasoning partisanship in favor of the views he has advocated which at times prevents his conclusions from being unhesitatingly adopted or even his statements of fact accepted. He has no intention to mislead, but his convictions are so strong that they unconsciously influence his expression. Having once taken a particular position, he shuts his eyes to any further consideration of the case save what makes for his own side. He hides from himself and naturally from others considerations and arguments that would expose his views to doubt or denial. But the first duty of an editor or commentator is to search not only for the truth, but for the whole truth. If facts militate or seem to militate against his conclusions, he is bound to state them in all their force and fulness. How constantly Professor Skeat fails to do this is particularly noticeable in his discussion of the genuineness of the "Romance of the Rose." For the sake, however, of illustrating this point fully, and of showing that the charge of intense partisanship made against him is not unjust, I shall here limit myself to his treatment of a single point of language, but that a crucial one.

On more than one occasion Professor Skeat has committed himself to the theory that Chaucer not rarely, but as a matter of fact never, rhymed a preterite of a weak verb, which should end in *e* with a past participle of a verb of the same conjugation; that is to say, for illustration, the preterite *ferde*, "fared," could not rhyme with the past participle *herd*, "heard." On this point he is very earnest. In order to make the poet's practice conform to his rule, he has had no scruple in one particular instance in following the authority of a single manuscript of the "Canterbury Tales," out of the seven printed, and that one inferior to at least three of the others. But in the course of his investigations he has had trials in enforcing this doctrine, and has resorted at different times to different methods of removing the obstacles that lay in his path. In the "Book of the Duchess" we meet with this couplet belonging to different sentences:

And wente his wey, whan he had sayd,
Anon this god of sleep abrayd.—Lines 191-2.

The following similar couplet is found in the "House of Fame":

Now herkneth, as I have you seyd,
What that I mette, or I abreyd.

In Professor Skeat's edition of the "Minor Poems" (p. 121), he appended to the last passage quoted the following footnote: "Grammar requires *seyd*, *abreyde*; the rime is false." In this footnote *seyd* is doubtless an oversight for *seyde*, or *abreyde* for *abreyd*.

There is, of course, something diverting in a man of the nineteenth century assuring the greatest writer of the fourteenth century that his grammar is bad because it does not fit in with his own views; still more in declaring that one of the greatest masters of metre the world has ever known was employing a false rhyme because his editor's theory would suffer a staggering blow if it could be regarded as a true one. It was evident that this would never do. By the time Professor Skeat had reached the annotations in the latter part of the work in question, he had undergone a change of heart. He had found out, as he believed, a method of preserving the integrity of Chaucer's metrical and grammatical virtue without infringing upon the rules which he himself had set up for the poet's guidance. So on pages 242 and 327 of the edition of the "Minor Poems" we find notes which directly contradict the foot-note on page 121. "The rime is correct," he writes on page 327, "because *abreyd* is a strong verb. Chaucer does not rime a pp. with a weak pt., which should have a final *e*. It is a point as to which he is very particular."

Some two or three years later I pointed out ("Studies in Chaucer," vol. i, p. 401) that both *breyde* and its compound *abreyde*, though originally strong verbs, had, like so many others, gone over in Chaucer's time to the weak conjugation. Consequently the regular preterites with him would be and were *breyde* and *abreyde*, not *breyd* and *abreyd*. Though as usual in his earlier volumes, Professor Skeat makes no reference to who said it, what was said was sufficient to lead him in the present edition to qualify somewhat his previous utterance. In the note to the passage in the "Book of the Duchess" the positive statement that *(a)breyde* is a strong verb received a slight modification. "However," he adds, "*breyde* (as if weak) also occurs." Against the passage in the "House of Fame," he appends his old note with this further deliverance: "Nevertheless *abreyde* also appears as a weak form by confusion with *leyde*, *seyde*, etc."

A man ignorant of the actual facts would be singularly constituted after reading the above, if he did not infer from it that *breyde* and *abreyde* are regularly employed by Chaucer as strong verbs, and that his use of them as weak verbs was the exception and not the rule. That is certainly the natural interpretation of the language. The consideration of the two passages in dispute will be here laid aside in determining the poet's practice. What in that case will be the evidence of the other passages in which these words occur? In the light of the editorial utterances just recorded, it may sound surprising, but it is nevertheless true, that both *breyde* and *abreyde* are always used by Chaucer as weak verbs, and never as strong. Here the evidence of rhyme is absolutely conclusive. The preterite *breyde* appears as a final rhyme just five times in the "Canterbury Tales," and in every instance it rhymes with a weak preterite. Those disposed to examine this point for themselves can find the word in line 739 of the Man of Law's tale; in line 365 of the Reeve's tale; in line 548 of the Monk's tale; in line 799 of the Prologue to the Wife of Bath's tale, and in line 299 of the Franklin's tale. Furthermore, in the "House of Fame" itself (line 1,678) *breyde* rhymes with the weak preterite *seyde*. The transition to the weak conjugation shows itself even in the past participle, when in "Anelida and Arcite" (line 124) *brayd* rhymes with the past participles *seyd* and *apayd*.

Exactly this same state of facts is true of all the compounds of *breyde*, including, of course, its most common compound *abreyde*. The preterite of this verb occurs as a final rhyme three times in the "Canterbury Tales"—in line 270 of the Reeve's tale, in line 188 of the Nun's Priest's tale, and in line 1,005 of the Clerk's tale. In each instance it rhymes with another weak preterite. Furthermore, it or *breyde* is used as a final rhyme four times in "Troilus and Criseyde" (1,724; iv. 1,212; v. 1,244, 1,262). There in every instance it is the weak preterite form that is employed, and never the strong. If this be not enough to establish the usage, it can be added that Gower, who more than half-a-dozen times uses as final rhymes the preterites of *breyde* and *abreyde*, invariably uses them as verbs of the weak conjugation.

Such is the real condition of things. The facts stated are indisputable. Professor Skeat was not necessarily bound to give them in detail, but he was bound to know them before making the assertion he did as to *abreyde* being a strong verb, and to state the natural inference that must be drawn from Chaucer's uniform practice elsewhere. This conviction was clearly forced later upon his own mind, for in the annotations to the "Canterbury Tales" (vol. v., p. 313) he takes up the subject again, though here as before his language is calculated to mislead. He there says that Chaucer is inconsistent in the use of this verb, and that in his earlier poems he has the old strong preterite, but in the "Canterbury Tales" the weak preterite. The examples given above—which include all the final rhymes—show that this statement is not true of the early poems. The facts given do not, indeed, make it absolutely impossible in the lines quoted from the "Book of the Duchess" and the "House of Fame" that *abreyde* was used as a strong verb. But they certainly render it grossly improbable; so improbable, in fact, that no one, unless he had a theory to uphold, would think of maintaining such a position; at any rate, neither the student nor the general reader is treated fairly by the course which has been adopted.

T. R. LOUNSBURY.

LITERARY NOTES.

"The Story of Bessie Costrell" is the title of Mrs. Humphry Ward's new novel. It is a tale of English village life. Serial publication will precede its appearance in book form.

Young Mr. Zangwill thinks log-rolling isn't so bad—as, indeed, one might reasonably expect him to think, considering his own comfortable progress along the literary path. "I myself have log-rolled," he says, "I am glad to say I have discovered men—that is, before other people have, and I haven't been ashamed to say it. There is so much praise that is injudicious, you see, that when one wants to introduce something really good to the public, one has to speak in hysterics and italics. What I don't hold with is one man writing six different opinions anonymously in six different papers, going off like a six-barrelled revolver." Why, why, doesn't Mr. Zangwill give the name of this revolving gentleman whose versatility certainly deserves what all the little budding poets and essayists call "recognition"?

Mr. Le Gallienne, another young writer who takes amiable views of practice with logs, is chortling defiance at his critics in the title of a work he is preparing for the press. This is a collection of his newspaper reviews and criticisms—a collection which he playfully calls "Retrospective Reviews: A Literary Log."

The American edition of the English "Bookman," as issued by Dodd & Mead is, it must be acknowledged, an improvement upon its original. Much interesting matter specially addressed to American readers has been added, and the form of the magazine is particularly attractive. Its pages pleasantly combine news, criticism, biography and literary history, and it promises to become a welcome visitor to reading people. The American conductors of the periodical will have an opportunity to weed out paragraphs relating to nonentities which often disfigure the English edition, and it is to be hoped that they will improve it.

We learn from this number that Mr. Arthur Sherburne Hardy's novel, "Passe Rose," illustrated by Mr. A. E. Sterner, is to be one of the holiday books of next season, and that Miss Katharine Pearson Woods, the author of "Metzerott Shoemaker," is writing a novel of the First Century which is to involve the question of Christianity and social reform.

High poetics take funny tumbles occasionally. A case in point comes from Venice. On the Grand Canal there a certain lordly palace now owned by Mr. Robert Barrett Browning is regarded with peculiar interest by English and American travellers as having been associated with his father's fame. It is hard not to grow sentimental as you pass in a gondola, hard not to think fine things of the celebrated poet. But now see what prose will do. There is a kitchen on the first floor, in the front of the house, and its lofty windows are screened only half way up. Pass but a few boat lengths further on, and just as you begin to quote "In a Gondola," you see over the sash a glittering array of pots and pans, a double row of shining kettles that calls up the whole aroma of a modern feast. But where does the poetry of association go?

"The American Congress," a history of National legislation and political events, is coming from the Harper press. Its author is Mr. J. W. Moore.

Mr. Bigelow's "Life of Samuel J. Tilden" will soon be brought out by this house.

The entire series of "English Men of Letters" is to be reissued by Macmillan. Each of the thirteen monthly volumes will contain three of the original books.

Some one rushed into print the other day with the observation that of all American writers of fiction Hawthorne was the only one who possessed genius. Mr. Dana neatly capped that sweeping statement. Thackeray once said to him, it appears, "that he thought Cooper a greater genius than Walter Scott, and an immortal story teller."

This is queer. An English writer says that the Swedes are, of all European nations, the greatest lovers of humorous writings, and that the most popular British author in Sweden is Mr. Jerome K. Jerome. The second clause of this statement would seem to contradict the first.

There is a truthful portrait of Coleridge in one of the letters of his period recently discovered in Birmingham. Here it is: "If he is excited by a remark in company, he will pour forth in an evening, without the least apparent effort, what would furnish matter for a hundred plays (7 pages); but the moment that he is to write, not from present impulse, but from pre-ordained deliberation, his powers fail him, and I believe that there are times when he could not pen the commonest note. He is one of those minds who, except in inspired moods, can do nothing."

Mr. Charles Godfrey Leland is making a new collection of "Breitmann's Ballads," which will soon be published here and in London.

The indefatigable Mrs. Oliphant has written another novel, which is announced for publication this spring. She calls it "Two Strangers."

"Gallia" is the title of a story of modern society which the traveller in the Carpathians, Miss Menie Muriel Dowie (Mrs. Norman), is about to publish.

The reception of M. Albert Sorel at the Académie Française has taken place, and his "eloge" of Taine is causing the mild discussion always provoked by a thorough, capable piece of work without inspiration or epigram; though Taine is not badly hit off as "a man of science who saw nature with the eye of a painter, a dialectician who wrote like a poet." All through his discourse M. Sorel revealed a keen appreciation of his subject, and what he had to say has intrinsic value; yet it must be confessed that the occasion revives more interest in Taine than in his eulogist. M. Sorel we know as an excellent writer whom the Academy has at last distinguished. Taine must be remembered as a man who distinguished the Academy, as the master of a critical method which commands increased admiration as time goes on. To be sure he preached a gospel which Sainte-Beuve preached before him, and as a literary critic the author of "Causeries" surpassed, on the whole, the man who wrote "De l'Intelligence," and the author of one of the most curious histories of English literature we have. But Taine gave a new significance to the "petits faits" of which he made so much, and he lent such a charm to his own handling to them that future writers are bound to be tempted into following his lead.

It was Mr. Andrew Lang, we believe, who said that when M. Taine had found out all he could about English watersheds and other matters of statistical knowledge, he was prepared to pass a judgment upon Shakespeare or Keats. This sounds well, but, as a matter of fact, Taine often went to the roots of things in his patient study of facts, in his reconstruction of a writer or a movement by a process of accumulation not unlike that which the mosaic worker gives you in his completed pavement; and you tread upon the basis that he gives you with something of the same confidence that the artisan aforesaid invites. He makes for sobriety of judgment and a sane, well-considered method. The man who tries to copy his rhetoric or his style will fail, but the man who emulates his zeal for exact knowledge, an ardor never concealed from his sympathetic readers by his color and his vivacity, will ground himself well in literary criticism.

Rolf Boldrewood—who is in reality Police Magistrate Tom Brown, of Victoria—has written a new novel which he calls "Sphinx of Eaglehawk."